

help your infant sleep longer and wake less during the night as soon as they are physically able.

Create a flexible feeding and sleeping routine

Sometimes the word 'routine' strikes fear into a parent's heart – they think that they will be confined and defined by the new baby. But I don't mean a rigid minute-by-minute 'must do' routine; more a predictable framework of feeding, sleeping and waking.

It's important not to underestimate how much sleep your infant really needs: as much as 16.5 hours in a 24-hour period when they are one week, and still 14.25 hours when they are six months. In the beginning they don't have much stamina to stay awake for long periods of time and when they do stay awake for too long – sometimes 45 minutes is enough – this can result in extreme fussiness and crying, that is often plain old overtiredness. We should learn to recognise our child's sleepy cues – yawning, rubbing eyes, zoning out; subtle signs that they are ready to go to sleep. I call this their 'sleep window'; they are naturally tired, the body temperature is right for sleep and sleep hormones are present in the body. If you miss your child's sleep window, the stress hormone cortisol floods their system, giving them that wired second wind and, in turn, making it hard for them to go to sleep and to stay asleep. As they get older, their sleep windows range from two to three hours throughout the day.

Establish some soothing techniques other than feeding

This too is helpful for those extreme fussy times. When your new baby cries, it is not always an indication that they are hungry. Given the chance, our babies will develop a host of ways to soothe themselves. You could try:

- ♥ Swaddling
- ♥ Carrying your baby
- ♥ Swinging or rocking – they love to be on their left-hand side and rocked/swung
- ♥ Repetitive sounds – white noise like the hairdryer or washing machine can instantly calm them
- ♥ Massage

Put your baby down drowsy but awake at least once a day

As I've already mentioned, learning to go to sleep is a skill your baby must develop

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and a key emotional skill. They won't be able to master this if you always feed them, rock them or walk them to go to sleep. The benefits of having some sort of predictable schedule is that you will have a good idea of when your baby is hungry and when they are tired.

At least once a day you could aim to put your infant into their moses basket or cot when it's sleep time and let them learn how to go to sleep. This is a great learning experience for your baby and will help them to sleep for longer periods at night as soon as they are physically capable. During this time, stay with your baby, being emotionally, physically and verbally responsive to them as they perfect the skill.

Create a calm, peaceful bedtime routine

A pre-sleep ritual, one that you can adapt and lengthen as your baby gets older, can be implemented in the early days and they'll soon learn to connect the steps of what happens when it's time to go to sleep. Try the following:

- ♥ Bath
- ♥ Baby massage
- ♥ Soft music
- ♥ Dimmed lights
- ♥ Snuggles and kisses

Don't forget to use an abbreviated bedtime routine for naps as well

It's hard for babies to go from activity to sleep during the day and it is our task as parents to make the transition as easy as possible. Ensure a peaceful sleeping environment that is conducive to sleep for day and night – adequately dark, avoiding bright external lights that can affect the sleep hormone even while sleeping. Remove any distractions, scary pictures, mirrors and images.

Ensure your child gets adequate daytime sleep appropriate for their age. Parents are often unsure how much sleep their baby should have during the day, but the following guidelines might help:

- ♥ Six-12 months – 2.5-3 hours
- ♥ 12-18 months – 2¼-2.5 hours

- ♥ 18-24 months – 2¼ hours
- ♥ Two years – 2 hours
- ♥ Three years – 1.5 hours

The quality of the day sleep as well as the quantity is important. From four months onwards we should be phasing out motion sleep as this is not the most restorative, and try to have a conventional sleeping place for days and nights.

Try to avoid night-time feedings once they are no longer necessary

Studies suggest that a large percentage of babies aged over six months do not require feeding overnight. Frequent feeding throughout the night may result in a persistent requirement for night feeds with conditioned hunger, increased wetting and recurrent night-time waking.

Be consistent in your responses during the night. An inconsistent response at night will result in frequent night-time waking. Changing your child's sleeping location throughout the night, lying down with them, sometimes feeding them, sometimes allowing them to play when they should be asleep will confuse them, give them mixed messages and ingrain night-time activity.

Remember, we want to enjoy our parenting experience and without sleep that is hard to do. Children who are sleep-deprived feel similar to how we feel without a good night's sleep and that can result in increased fussiness; irritability; inability to play independently or with others; decreased capacity for learning, memory and reasoning; behavioural problems; aggressive behaviour; obesity and poor immune systems. Establishing healthy sleep for the whole family is an essential component in parenting. Good luck! ♥

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